

ADVICE FOR PARENTS ON HOW TO:

Establish a Parent-Teacher Relationship

The first contact with your child's teacher, in many ways, is the most important. This is the time you are building rapport and developing a relationship of trust. Therefore, an appropriate time and setting is important for the first brief encounter. A phone call, a note, or, best of all, an initial face-to-face meeting is best. A good time to contact your child's teacher is during the first week of school. This gives you an opportunity to meet one another when neither has any complaints. Otherwise, the first teacher contact can be unpleasant. The teacher is usually calling to describe some unacceptable behavior or report a child's lack of progress and her concern that a learning problem may exist. This kind of contact usually puts a parent on the defensive, and communication can be hampered. Neither party wins, and the biggest loser is your child.

However, during the first week of school, the teacher probably knows very little about your child. Thus, you are in a position to provide some helpful information. This is the time to mention then identify these. And, last but not least, assure the teacher that she has your full support and cooperation. Provide the teacher with your phone number and tell her to feel free to call when help is needed from home. Let the teacher know from the start that you want to work with her, not against her, so your child will learn. Do not feel you are intruding or asking for special treatment. You are simply indicating that you are truly concerned that your child receives a good education.

After your child has spent six weeks in school, again call or drop a note to check on your child's progress. If a conference needs to be set up, do it immediately. Even if your child is doing well, you may still want a conference. If your child is in kindergarten or first-grade, the following questions may be the most appropriate:

1. Is my child able to get along with others?
2. Can my child participate well in group activities?
3. What can I do to encourage or help my child learn to read?
4. Can you describe my child's reading program?
5. In second and third grade you may want to ask these additional questions:
6. Is my child experiencing difficulty with any specific skills? If so, what are they? How can we help him with these skills?
7. Is my child experiencing any difficulty that may hinder him in the future?

Guidelines

Let's consider specific guidelines to help you communicate effectively with your child's teacher. Practice these guidelines, and

your child will reap the benefits.

Guideline 1: Identify the purpose for the conference. Is it to become acquainted? Is it to alleviate your concerns about your child's poor attitude towards reading and/or school? Or is it to receive a report card and test scores? Each of these situations is vastly different and requires different preparation.

Guideline 2: Communicate the purpose for the conference. If you are requesting the conference, immediately tell the teacher the purpose. This helps to alleviate any imagined fears the teacher may have about your request to hold a conference.

Guideline 3: Arrange the conference at the teacher's convenience. The teacher then has sufficient time to plan and to have the necessary information at the conference. An unplanned conference can turn out to be a waste of time for both teacher and parent and cause feelings of frustration.

Guideline 4: Plan for the conference. Write out the areas and questions you want the conference to cover. Combine, delete, and clarify these questions, and, finally, prioritize them. By using this process, your most important questions will be answered in a clear, succinct manner. Moreover, the teacher's responses will likely be clearer and more to the point.

Guideline 5: Restate the purpose of the conference at the onset. Try to stay on one topic since your time together is limited.

Guideline 6: Display a positive attitude during the conference. Be aware that not only what you say reflects your attitude, but also your tone of voice, facial expression, and body movements. A loud voice may imply dominance. Rigid posture may suggest anger or disapproval. Always listen attentively and show your enthusiasm.

Guideline 7: Remain open and supportive throughout the conference. Don't become antagonistic or defensive; otherwise the conference outcome can be disastrous. Strive for cooperation between you and your child's teacher. Even when teachers present a negative side of your child's behavior or inform you of other problems, try to remain objective. This can be difficult when it is your child, but he will experience as many or more difficulties if you and the teacher don't try to find a way to work together to solve these problems.

Guideline 8: Make sure suggestions are provided to increase your child's growth. If your child is doing well, find out what you can do to ensure continued success and progress. If he has difficulties, make sure the teacher goes beyond merely pointing out a problem. The teacher needs to provide ideas for eliminating or reducing the difficulty. Many parents have been discouraged or aggravated because teachers point out problems but don't provide solutions. Don't let this situation occur! If immediate suggestions can't be provided, then a follow-up conference is needed.

Guideline 9: Ask for examples of daily work to better understand your child's strengths and weaknesses. By reviewing your child's work, you will learn if progress has been made since the last conference. Have any weaknesses become more severe? If improvement hasn't been made, are other methods or materials being used? As a parent, what should you be doing at home

with your child?

Guideline 10: Clarify and summarize each important point as it is discussed. Thus, both teacher and parent are better able to develop a mutual understanding and agreement. Let's look at a conference in which a parent does a good job of clarifying and summarizing a major point.

Teacher Susan has difficulties with oral reading. She is not reading smoothly and tends to read in a word-by-word fashion. If Susan reads along with a taped version of a book, her oral reading would improve. Can you provide Susan with taped versions of books?

Parent: Susan is a poor reader. Do you want me to make tapes of books so Susan can read along with the tape?

Teacher: Yes, you can make tapes, but the public and school library can also provide you with tapes and books. Also, I would like to clarify one point about Susan's reading ability. She has some difficulty with oral reading, but I would not classify her as a poor reader.

Parent: Thank-you for the clarification. Susan and I will work together on improving oral reading. We will check the school and the public library for some books and tapes.

If the parent hadn't summarized and clarified what was heard in this conference, a misconception might have developed- By suggesting that she would tape books for Susan, the parent was able to find out if the suggestion was appropriate as well as learning about alternatives. Notice that this parent summarized the conference at the end so both parties received the same message.

Guideline 11: Once agreement is reached, discuss the next topic. During the conference, you may want the teacher to understand certain things about your child. or you may have a special request. Once your point is understood and the teacher has agreed, it is wise not to continue the same discussion. It may present new questions which may reverse the previously made agreement. Once a decision is made, it is best to start discussing the next point. You will find the conference to be much more productive.

Guideline 12: Make sure you understand the information the teacher is supplying. Often teachers use educational jargon, not realizing parents don't understand. Don't be afraid to ask for an explanation or definition. Make sure when the conference ends you have understood all the information reported. If you're confused or uncertain, your child won't benefit and learning may be hindered.

Guideline 13: Keep conferences short. Conferences that run more than 40 minutes can be tiresome for both parent and teacher. If you can't accomplish all that has been planned, ask for another conference. By scheduling a future conference, you

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will have an opportunity to follow up on previous agreements and revise them if necessary

Suggested Reading:

[Building Successful Parent-Teacher Partnerships](#) (A guide for parents and teachers)

[Bad Teachers : The Essential Guide for Concerned Parents](#) (Through sample situations and a wealth of information on today's educational system, Guy Strickland--a teacher and school administrator for over 30 years--offers a practical approach to determine if a child's learning roadblocks stem from a bad teacher, and if so, how to solve that problem right away)

[Getting Involved in Your Child's Schooling](#)

[Communicating Effectively with School Personnel](#)

[The Parent-Teacher Conference](#)